

INDIA

Statement

by

Dr. Satyanarayan Jatiya
Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India

at the
Second World Assembly on Ageing

at Madrid, Spain
8th to 12th April 2002

Mr. Chairperson, I join other distinguished speakers on this, the opening day of the Second World Assembly of Ageing, in thanking the Government of Spain for hosting the Assembly in the beautiful city of Madrid. I would also like to congratulate the United Nation for organizing the Conference.

2. Twenty years ago the nations of the world had gathered at Vienna for the First World Assembly on Ageing and brought out the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The Plan of Action was drawn up with clear understanding of the implications that the increase in the ageing population would have on the socio-economic structure of both the developed and developing countries. The basic aim of the Plan of Action was to ensure that ageing is both a graceful and a productive process. The Madrid Assembly provides us with an opportunity to review what has been done so far and draw up a plan for the future by mainstreaming the Ageing agenda with current global developmental issues.

3. The Government of India is committed to provide an effective environment to secure the goals of economic and emotional security for the elderly. It also recognizes that all institutions of civil society, individuals and the community at large are equal and effective partners in securing that goal.

4. India is a federal polity of one thousand million people. It is estimated that the number of older persons will grow to 137 million by 2021 in our country. In Indian tradition, an individual life span has been divided into four Ashrams (stages) namely, Baramcharya

(learning in the State of Celibacy), Grahast (family life), Vanprasad (detached family life) and Sanyast (Renounced life). It is this last state of life that society accorded highest respect and prestige to an individual. This is why old age home concept is alien to India.

5. However, globalization and its economic effects, is causing a silent and invisible transformation within the social structures. Fragmentation of the traditional family network is leading to an erosion of the available support within the immediate and extended family. Migration of younger generations from rural to urban areas and from one urban centre to another and transnational migration results in the elderly persons being left out to fend for themselves at a time when family support becomes more necessary.

6. The Government of India adopted the National Policy for Older Persons, in 1999. The Policy takes a comprehensive view of the needs of the aged and assures them that their concerns are national concerns and they will not live unprotected, ignored or marginalized. In keeping with India's commitment to the basic principles of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, our national policy enjoins the State and civil society to extend support for financial security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons, provide protection against abuse and exploitation and empower them. A five year plan of Action from 2000 to 2005 has been drawn up to identify the role of the State Governments and the Central Government in implementing the National Policy for Older Persons and review its implementation every three years.

7. In dealing with the issue of ageing, some key factors, which emerge, are:

- Facilitating partnership amongst various players like Governments, civil society, private sector, etc.
- The need to prepare oneself in advance for financial security in old age.
- Recognizing the aged as a resource pool.
- Better health-care facilities for all older persons.
- Extending proper protection, security and legal rights.
- Commitment to gender equality in the programmes for the aged.

8. Recognizing that financial security is one of their needs, the Government of India commissioned a National Project titled 'Old Age Social and Income Security' (OASIS) in 1999 with an aim to draw up a comprehensive plan for the financial security of workers on retirement and old age in sectors where no formal arrangements for postretirement have been made.

9. The Government already covers around 32 million workers and their families under schemes for provident funds and health and insurance facilities. However, there is a need to reach out to many more who do not have access to such schemes and would be

rendered vulnerable on attaining retirement and old age. The Old Age Social and Income Security Scheme as and when adopted for implementation would enable each persons to save during his working life for his/her and spouse's financial security.

10. The role of Non-governmental organizations is crucial in promoting the welfare of the aged. The Government of India provides financial assistance to NGOs for certain projects aimed at providing shelter and meeting recreational and medical needs of the elderly.

11. The Government of India is committed to the empowerment of the older persons. It realizes that ageing is an ongoing process. The population of older persons is increasing every year and the changing social order is not always conducive to their well being. Striking a balance between aspirations of the young and the rights of the aged members of society is a daunting task for any nation, particularly for economies in transition such as India. The Government of India has recognized both these aspects. The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment as the nodal agency continues to coordinate and provide the basic roadmap for policies on the aged, the other partners including various other Ministries of the Central Government and the State Governments, civil society and nongovernmental organizations also play crucial roles. Special privileges like old age pension, tax concessions and various amenities in the transportation and health services, provision of services at the grass root level by NGOs and emerging civil society groups which proactively voicing the concerns of the aged are some of the encouraging developments in our country. While the problems of the aged often cut across national boundaries and have almost an equal impact, there are bound to be some differences both in perceptions and actual ground realities from nation to nation. Every country will have to evolve its own strategy in meeting the challenges and harnessing the advantages of a growing resource pool of elderly citizens in line with their cultural and traditional values as well as national perspectives. We at the same line recognize that an Ageing world is a shared inheritance and the 21 " Century will be a turning point for the sharing of knowledge and resources between nations as they strive to meet the rights of all citizens.

12. We have already adopted a policy in this- regard. We have taken concrete steps for the care and welfare of the elderly people. We provide financial assistance to NGOs for setting-up Old Age Homes. Government of India plans significant measure for betterment of the aged people in the 10 " Five Year Plan, which commences from this year.

13. The elderly people in their productive spans of life have made significant contributions to the development and prosperity of the world. We, in India, will certainly do everything possible to honour them. Hon'ble Chairperson, the Government of India once again reiterates its commitment to the need for recognizing the challenge and reality of an ageing world and its implications.

I am hopeful that this Assembly will find all nations reaffirming their commitment towards a better world for the aged.

May all living being be happy;
May all be free from disease;
May there be no suffering.

Source: <http://www.un.org/ageing/coverage/indiaE.htm>